

NEWS

Depot Marine relives chaos, pain of Beirut bombing

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PRESS CHIEF

October 23, 1983, was a normal day for 23-year-old Lance Cpl. Charles M. Anderson and the Marines of 81mm Mortar Platoon, Weapons Co., 1st Battalion, 8th Marines, who made their residence on the airstrip of the Beirut International Airport in Beirut, Lebanon.

The Marines, who were in country as part of a multinational force trying to help restore order and stability in Lebanon, went about their normal routine after receiving mortar fire until about 5:30 a.m. — about the time one of many cease-fires were issued.

The Marines went to Condition 4, which gave them an opportunity to “relax” after weeks of sporadic sniper and mortar attacks.

Almost two hours later, Anderson heard two loud blasts before seeing the large mushroom clouds that were the result of a truck loaded with 2,000 pounds of explosives crashing into the Marine barracks that housed the headquarters element for Battalion Landing Team 1/. The attack killed 241 and injuring nearly 100 others.

“We requested permission to go in the building and check things out,” recalled Anderson, now a 43-year-old

master sergeant. “When we got there, there were people crying, hurt ... it was pretty chaotic.”

Anderson and other Marines from Weapons, 1/8, noticed two corpsmen emerge from the devastated building, followed by seven Marines who were in the upper level of the barracks. The corpsmen and Marines quickly took action despite the chaos.

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- Master Sgt. Charles M. Anderson, former member of 81mm Mortar Platoon, Weapons Co., 1st Battalion, 8th Marines

few Marines in Beirut at the time still on active duty. “Everyone was writing down the names of anyone who could have been in the building to gain accountability and keep track of who might have been killed or is still alive.”

There were a lot of mixed emotions, said Anderson.

Among the hate, discontent and sadness, confusion set in among the Marines and other service members who were affected by the terrorist attack.

“The Marines were not known as a peace-keeping force back then,” said Anderson. “There was an overall feeling of, ‘Why are we here?’”

The Marines had been stationed in Lebanon to provide a peace-keeping presence. The year before, in June, the Israelis had invaded Lebanon in one final push to drive out PLO terrorists.

This move upset the balance

in the Middle East, and U.S. forces were attempting to referee the withdrawal of all foreign troops from Lebanon.

The earlier Embassy bombing in April of that year and the bombing of the Marine barracks are what some consider the beginning of the War on Terror.

The bombing was considered the most deadly act of terrorism toward Americans prior to Sept. 11, 2001, when the world witnessed the destruction of the World Trade Center and the damage to the Pentagon.

Anderson, who is also a native of New York, said there were many similarities between what happened in Beirut and the World Trade Center.

“I know the exact feelings of the people in New York,” Anderson said. “You go about your everyday life never thinking that something like this couldn’t happen — and all of a sudden, your life changes.”

He said the terrorist attacks of 9/11 rekindled a lot of feelings from his time in Beirut, and the surprise and chaos he and his fellow Marines dealt with that morning are similar to those felt by people in New York.

“There were a lot of innocent victims in New York and the Pentagon, but what happened in Beirut happened to my brothers ... my friends,” he said as he recalled the names of friends and comrades like it happened yesterday. “That’s when you really understand the meaning of ‘band of brothers.’”

To remember the brothers and friends who were killed or wounded in Beirut, the Beirut Veterans Association in Jacksonville, N.C., hosted a memorial Oct. 23 at Camp Lejeune, N.C., to commemorate the 20th anniversary.

The ceremony rekindled some of the same mixed emotions felt



Staff Sgt. Benjamin N. Haynes

Master Sgt. Charles Anderson displays the plaque he received for his service in Beirut May 29, 1983 to Nov. 17, 1983. Anderson recently returned from the memorial at Camp Lejeune, N.C., commemorating the 20-year anniversary of the Beirut bombing.

on that day 20 years ago.

“A lot of people that were there that day debated coming because they didn’t want to relive the horror many of us felt,” said Anderson. “But it was outstanding on both a happy and sad note.”

According to Anderson, the ceremony did great justice to the service members and to the families of those who served there — even those who first stepped foot in Beirut in 1958.

“It was a beautiful experience, [the City of] Jacksonville did their share to help,” he said.

“It was good to see some of the faces of old friends and brothers,” said Anderson. “1/8 was tight from the beginning, but death and tragedy make you tighter.”



Courtesy of Master Sgt. Charles Anderson

Master Sgt. Charles Anderson, assistant for officer procurement, who was a lance corporal in Beirut during the bombing of the Marine Barracks, is one of the few there who is still on active duty.